

Test Your Fitness Level



How do you measure the success of your fitness program? By how much weight you lose? How many inches you trim off your waistline or hips? How well you sleep at night? How energetic you feel?

These are all worthwhile criteria. Another way to evaluate your fitness level—and assess your progress—is to keep track of your resting heart rate (that is, your pulse rate when you're least active). The idea is, the lower your resting heart rate, the better shape your heart is in. So as you become more fit, your resting heart rate should drop.

Here's how to measure it.

1. Take your pulse as soon as you wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed.
2. Count the number of beats for 10 seconds and multiply by six. This will give you your pulse in beats per minute.
3. Repeat the following morning. Then calculate the average of the two. (That is, add the two numbers together and divide by two.) This is your resting heart rate.

Calculate your resting heart rate every three months, as conditioning takes some time to have an effect.

Take the "Talk Test"

No, this isn't a suggestion that you audition to guest host "The Tonight Show." It's just a simple way for you to tell if you're overdoing it when you exercise. If you're too out of breath to comfortably carry on a conversation with another person as you dance, run, or slam-dunk your way to fitness, you're probably working too hard and should slow down. (On the other hand, you should be working hard enough to break a mild sweat.) And of course, any unusual sign of physical distress (such as chest discomfort, pain of any kind, or dizziness) is a signal to slow down to a stop.